

FABLES AND FOLKTALES

ADAPTED FROM TOLSTOY




BARRON'S

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Woodbury, New York, London / Toronto / Sydney



THE HAWK AND THE ROOSTER

A hawk was trained by her master to come when he called, and to sit on his hand.

But the rooster ran away, terrified, whenever the master came near him.

The hawk scolded the rooster. "What ungrateful animals you roosters are! You run to the master only when you are hungry. But we wild birds are thankful to the master. We know that he cares for us. So when he calls, we don't run away. Instead, we go and sit on his hand."

"Sure!" replied the rooster. "That's because you've never seen a rooster hawk. But I've seen plenty of roosters cooking on the spit!"

THE STAG AND THE VINEYARD

A stag escaped from hunters who were chasing him by hiding among the vines of a lush vineyard.

As soon as the hunters turned away, the stag forgot to be careful and began nibbling at the juicy leaves.

When the hunters saw the vine move, they realized the stag must be hiding behind it. They took up their rifles, aimed, and almost hit the terrified animal.

As he was running away, the stag thought, "It serves me right for being so impatient. If only I had waited another moment, the vine would have kept me perfectly safe."





THE DONKEY AND THE HORSE

A man had a donkey and a horse, both going along the same road.

At one point, the donkey, who was very tired, begged the horse for help. "I can't stand up anymore. Please take part of my burden."

But the horse refused. Exhausted, the poor donkey fell to the ground.

The master then loaded the donkey's burden onto the horse. On top of that he loaded the poor, tired donkey.

"I brought this on myself," cried the horse. "A little while ago I refused to share the donkey's load. Now I must carry not only its entire burden, but the donkey as well!"

THE WOODSMAN AND THE SPIRIT OF THE RIVER

When a woodsman lost his only axe in the river, he sat on the river bank and began to cry.

The spirit of the river heard the man and realized how unhappy he was. So the spirit rose from the dark, muddy river bottom and showed the woodsman a golden axe.

"Is this your axe?" he asked.

"No, it's not mine," answered the woodsman.



The spirit went down again and came back holding a silver axe.

"Is this your axe, then?"

"No, that one's not mine, either."

Then the spirit of the river disappeared into the icy water and brought the woodsman his own axe.

As soon as he saw it the woodsman shouted with joy. "Yes, yes, that's my axe!"

The spirit rewarded the man for his honesty by giving him not only his own axe, but the gold and silver ones as well.

The good man happily returned home and told his friends how lucky he had been.

Another woodsman, greedy for riches, decided to try his luck. He went to the river and threw in his axe. Then, sitting by the bank, he began to cry loudly.



The spirit of the river appeared, showed him a golden axe, and asked, "Is this your axe?"

"Oh, yes, definitely! That's my axe!"

But the spirit was angered by this dishonesty. So the man didn't get the golden axe. And he didn't get back his own axe, either.

And that is the only reward dishonesty deserves in this world.

THE STAG

A stag went to the stream for a drink and saw his reflection in the water. Pleased, he began to admire his antlers. "How beautiful and graceful they are. What superb branches they have!"

Then the stag looked at the lower part of his body.

"But see how knobby and ugly my legs are. They certainly don't match the rest of me!"

While the stag was having these thoughts a lion leaped at him with a roar. The terrified stag dashed away and fled through a clearing.



In a few seconds his thin, bony legs had carried him far away. The lion would surely never have reached him if his antlers had not gotten tangled in some branches.

Before long the poor stag could hear the lion approaching. But at the very last moment, the stag broke free. "How foolish I was to scorn my legs!" he thought as he dashed to safety. "Now I have learned that looks aren't everything."



THE TWO HORSES

Two horses walked together, each pulling a cart.

The first horse worked hard, didn't get tired, and never needed a break. The second didn't want to work and kept stopping by the side of the road to rest.

So it was that the whole burden was moved to the first horse's cart.



The second horse, now free of its burden, mocked the first. "What have you gained by working so hard? Nothing. You have even made your life worse. The master has doubled your load. Now you will be forced to work even harder."

But when they arrived home, the master thought, "Why should I keep two horses? One is enough to carry my goods. I'll feed the first one very well and sell the lazy one."

"Well," thought the first horse, "It seems that hard work does pay after all."

THE CROW AND THE PIGEONS

A crow thought that pigeons, who were fed and cared for by people, had a better life than it did.

So it painted its feathers white and sneaked into a pigeons' house. At first the pigeons didn't notice the trick and let the crow in. But then the crow forgot itself for a moment and started to cackle. The angry pigeons chased it out with their beaks.

When the crow went back to the other crows, they were suspicious of its white feathers. They chased it away, just as the pigeons had done.

And the crow thought, "I should have been satisfied with myself as a crow. It's foolish to try to act like someone you are not!"



THE ANT AND THE DOVE

A thirsty ant went to the stream to drink. Suddenly it got caught in a whirlpool and was almost carried away.

At that moment a dove was passing by with a twig in its beak. The dove dropped the twig for the tiny insect to grab hold of. So it was that the ant was saved.

A few days later a hunter was about to catch the dove in his net. When the ant saw what was happening, it walked right up to the man and bit him on the foot. Startled, the man dropped the net. And the dove, thinking that you never can tell how or when a kindness may be repaid, flew away.





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The hawk scolded the rooster. "What ungrateful animals you roosters are! You run to the master only when you are hungry. But we wild birds are thankful to the master. We know that he cares for us. So when he calls, we don't run away. Instead, we go and sit on his hand."

"Sure!" replied the rooster. "That's because you've never seen a roast hawk. But I've seen plenty of roosters cooking on the spit!"

THE FOX

A fox fell into a trap and tried as hard as it could to get away. Finally it succeeded. But as it was wriggling out, alas, it lost its beautiful tail.

To hide this defect, the fox tried to convince the other foxes to cut off their tails, too.

"Dear friends, why are you carrying around such a useless weight? It would be better to cut your tails off. Get rid of this silly annoyance."

But one of the foxes made it hard for the liar. "You certainly wouldn't talk that way if you still had your useless weight," it said.

So the fox, who had nothing to reply, went away embarrassed.



THE FISHERMAN AND THE LITTLE FISH

A fisherman caught a little fish on his hook. When he pulled it out of the water, the fish said to him, "I beg you, fisherman, throw me back into the water. I am too small. What would you do with me? If you throw me back in the water, I will grow until I am fat and tasty. When you catch me again you will be happy with me. Then it will be worthwhile to keep me."

But the fisherman answered, "A little fish on the hook is better than a big one in the water."





THE WOLF AND THE GOAT

A wolf saw a goat that was having a hard time nibbling the grass on a very steep, rocky mountain.

"Why get so tired out?" the wolf called up to the goat. "Up there the grass is scarce, and the ground is uneven. Come here where I am. The pasture is level, and you will find tastier grass."

The goat thought it over and replied, "You're not inviting me because you're worried about what I eat. The only thing you're worried about is what you eat. I'll stay where I am and be safe!"

THE LION, THE DONKEY, AND THE FOX

One day a lion, a donkey, and a fox decided to go hunting. They had a good day. When it came time to divide the game, the lion ordered the donkey to split it up equally.

The obedient donkey made three equal piles. But when the lion saw them, he became furious. He chased the donkey away.

Then the lion turned to the fox and said, "That donkey was a good-for-nothing. You split up the game fairly."

The crafty fox put almost all the game in the lion's pile. She kept only a small share for herself.

"You have the right idea," said the lion. "Tell me, who taught you to share so well?"

"Have you already forgotten what just happened?" replied the clever fox. "The donkey may not have known how to share with a lion, but he certainly taught me the right way to go about it!"



THE HERON, THE FISH, AND THE SHRIMP

A heron that lived near a pond had become lazy. It didn't feel like chasing after fish any longer.

But its hunger was still as strong as ever. So it decided to make up for its laziness by being clever.

It said to the fish, "My friends, a terrible thing is about to happen. Some men are going to dry up the pond and catch you all. And just think, on the other side of the mountain there is another pond. It is small but very nice! If only you could go there, you would all be saved. Too bad you don't trust me or I would certainly help you!"

The fish, terrified by this news, began to cry. They begged the heron to carry them to safety on the other side of the mountain.

The heron pretended to think about it. Then it said, "Well, I do feel sorry for you. And since I am your friend, I can't leave you when you are in danger. I will take you to that pond. But only one at a time. Not all at once."

The fish rejoiced at the heron's words. Each one wanted to be taken first. "Take me; take me!" they begged in chorus.





And then the heron began its terrible trick.

One by one it brought each fish over the mountain, laid it down in the field, and then ate it up.

But an old shrimp lived near the pond. All those comings and goings made the shrimp suspicious. It decided to take a closer look.

"Please take me to that new valley," it asked the heron.

So the heron took the small shellfish and carried it over the mountain to the field. There, the shrimp saw all the bones of the fish that the heron had eaten. Squeezing its claws tightly around the heron's neck, the shrimp strangled the bird.

Then the old shrimp crawled back toward the pond. Once there, it told the remaining fish not to be so trusting when former enemies claim to be old friends.



THE LION, THE BEAR, AND THE FOX

A lion and a bear found a nice piece of meat. But when they couldn't agree on how to divide it between them, they began to fight.

They fought so hard that in the end they both dropped to the ground and fell asleep.

A crafty fox who had been watching them came out of its hiding place. It seized the tasty morsel, and happily ran away.

And so the greedy bear and lion found that in a fight, everyone can be a loser.

THE WOLF AND THE OLD WOMAN

A hungry wolf searched for days and days for something to sink its teeth into.

One day it came to a village. In one house it heard a child crying and an old woman saying, "If you don't stop crying right now, I'm going to tell the wolf to gobble you up!"

The wolf thought its troubles were over and sat patiently waiting to eat the child.

But when night fell, the wolf heard the same old woman say, "Don't cry, sweetheart. If the wolf tries to come here, we will kill it."

"This town must be full of liars," grumbled the wolf. "The people certainly don't keep their promises."

So, hungry and cold, the wolf went away. It never knew that even when she was threatening the child, the old woman loved him more dearly than anything else in the world.



THE HARES AND THE FROGS

One day all the hares got together to complain about their life.

"People, dogs, eagles, and wild animals are always chasing after us. What kind of life is this? We would be better off ending it forever, rather than living in constant pain and fear. Fellow hares, let's go drown ourselves."

But when the frogs sitting on the grassy banks heard the hares coming, they were scared to death and threw themselves into the water.



This made the wisest hare stop and think. She turned to her companions.

"Stop! Wait!" she cried. "I'm not convinced any more that our life is worse than everyone else's. Just look at the frogs. They must be even worse off! They are afraid of everything, even us."

And so the hares went home, realizing that, no matter how miserable you may think you are, there is always someone even more unfortunate.



THE HORSE AND ITS MASTERS

A horse that worked for a gardener could see over the fence into the potter's yard next door.

"Oh," thought the horse, "if only I worked for the potter. I'm sure my life would be much easier than it is now!"

The horse's prayers were answered. A few days later it was sold to the potter.

At first the horse liked having a new master. But soon it noticed that working for the potter was even harder and more tiring than working for the gardener had been.

From the potter's yard, the horse could now see into the courtyard of a merchant. Once again the horse prayed to be sold. And once again its prayers were answered.

The horse rejoiced, but not for long. The merchant worked it from morning until night. And it never had enough to eat. "Unhappy me," it cried. "I would have been far better off with either of my old masters."

"Why is it," the horse wondered sadly, "that life always seems easier on the other side of the fence?"

THE PEASANT AND THE WATERMELONS

One night a peasant went to a farmer's field to steal his watermelons.

As the peasant crept along the ground, he thought, "If I can steal a whole bag, I'll be able to sell them and buy a hen. The hen will lay many eggs. When the eggs hatch I'll have lots of chicks. Then, I'll sell the chicks and buy a young, healthy sow who will make me several piglets.

"I'll take the piglets to the market and sell them. Then I'll have enough money to buy a mare. She'll give birth to some tiny colts. When I sell them, I'll buy a house with a big garden all around it.





"I'll plant many watermelons in my garden. But I certainly won't be foolish enough to have them stolen!"

"I'll have watchmen, and I myself will guard them!"

"I'll have everything under control and tell my watchmen. 'Hey, you, watch carefully!'"

But the peasant thief was carried away by his imaginings. Forgetting that he was in the farmer's field, he shouted, "Watch carefully!"

The farmer's watchmen heard him. In a flash they ran to him and beat him soundly.

And that was the end of the dishonest peasant's schemes.

THE TWO MERCHANTS

A poor scrap-iron dealer who had to go on a long trip decided to leave all of his goods with a rich merchant.

Upon his return he went to get his iron, but the merchant had sold everything and pocketed the money.

The rogue of a rich merchant tried to fool the poor one. "Imagine, an unbelievable disaster has occurred!"

"What do you mean?" asked the poor merchant.

"The mice have gnawed your iron down to the last ounce. There's nothing left. Come and see for yourself."

"I'll take your word for it," replied the iron dealer. "Everyone knows that mice can gnaw iron. Good-bye." And with these words, the poor merchant went out the door.

As he was walking away, the poor merchant saw the rogue's son playing in the street. He spoke to him kindly, picked him up, and took him home.

The next day the rich merchant told the poor one of the sad misfortune. "Please help me!" he begged. "Have you seen any trace of my child? Have you heard anything about where he might be?"

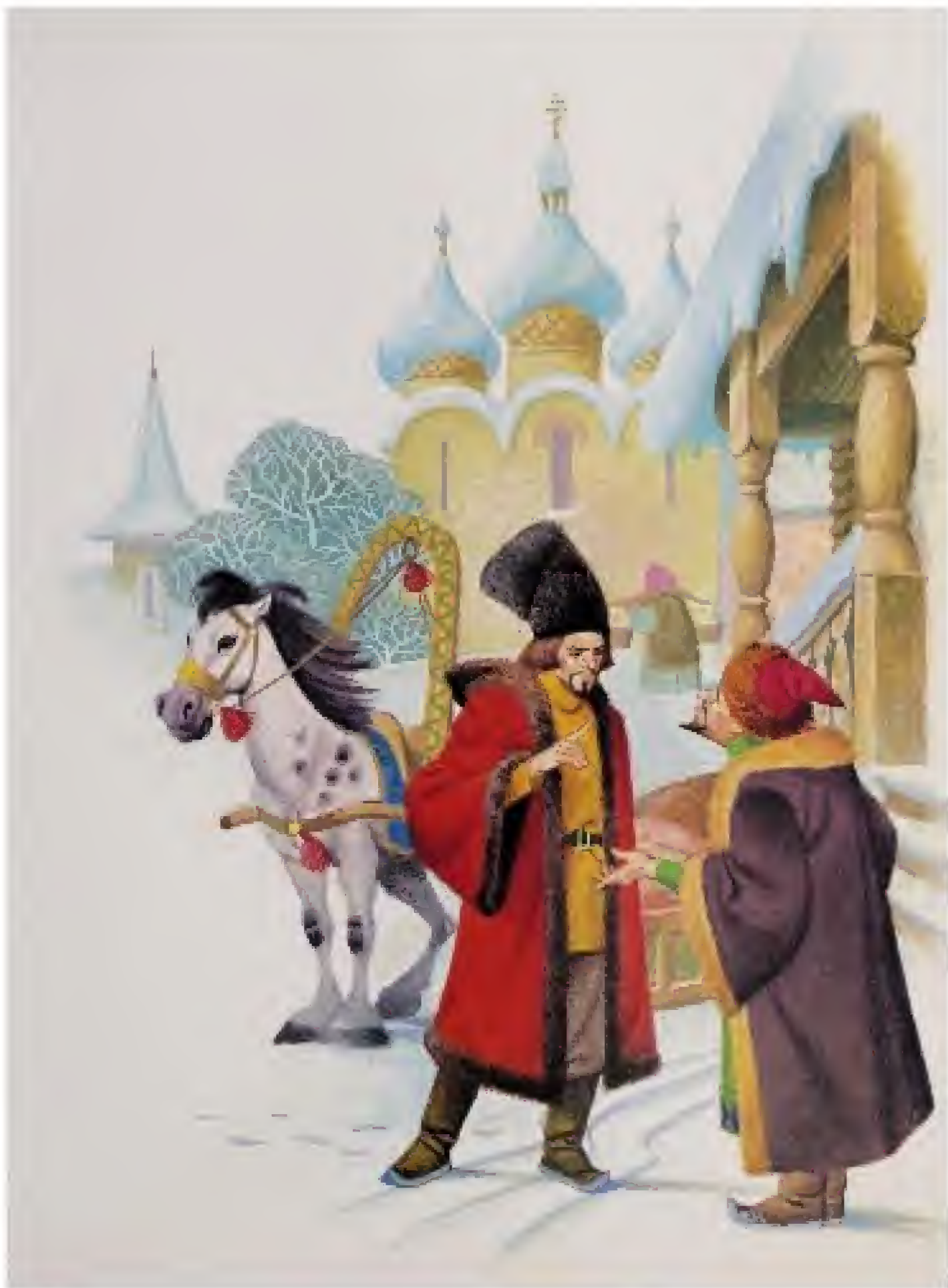
"Oh, yes!" replied the poor merchant. "Just yesterday when I left your house, I saw a hawk pounce on your son and take him away."

"Come now! No such thing has ever happened! Hawks don't kidnap children. How dare you mock me?" said the rich merchant.

"But I'm not mocking you at all! As long as mice can gnaw through iron, I don't find it strange for a hawk to take away a child."

Then the rich merchant understood. "It wasn't true that mice gnawed through your iron," he said. "I sold it. But I will repay you down to the last penny. I'll even pay you double what I made."

"Well, since you put it that way," said the poor merchant. "the hawk didn't kidnap your child, either. I will be happy to give him back to you."



THE CZAR AND THE HAWK

During a hunt, the czar sent his favorite hawk after a hare. Then he followed it on horseback.

The hawk managed to catch the hare, and the czar came and took it, feeling satisfied.

Then the czar got back on his horse and went searching for some water to drink. He reached the foot of a hill and saw water dripping from a fountain drop by drop.

The czar took a cup and put it under the tiny fountain. When it was full he wanted to drink from it. But the hawk that was perched on his arm knocked its wings against the cup and spilled all the water.

The czar then put the cup back under the fountain and waited patiently for it to fill. When the water had reached the brim he put it to his lips. But again the bird moved its wings, and again all the water ended up on the ground.

Without showing any anger, the czar filled his cup again. But for the third time the hawk knocked it over with its wings.





Beside himself with anger and thirst, the czar hurled the hawk against a rock. The poor bird fell to the ground with a broken wing.

Just then the czar's servants arrived on horseback. One of them went to the fountain to fill the czar's cup. He returned in a few minutes empty-handed.

"The water of this fountain is poisoned," he said. "A dragon has breathed deadly fumes into it. If the hawk had not spilled the water, by now you would certainly be dead."

The czar then repented bitterly for what he had done. He said, "How badly I've treated my hawk. It saved my life, and in return I mistreated it. Next time I will surely think before I act so rashly!"

THE CRANES AND THE STORK

A peasant saw that some cranes were ruining his harvest, so he decided to capture them by spreading out big nets.

His trap worked. But along with the cranes, the peasant caught a stork.

"Set me free, I beg you," said the stork to the peasant. "I don't have anything to do with the cranes. I am a completely different kind of bird. I am more beautiful, more elegant, more respectable. I come from noble stock. I even live on the roof of your father's house. Just look at my fine feathers. You will see that I'm telling the truth!"

But the peasant just replied, "Sorry, my dear, I've caught you with the cranes. You must suffer their fate."

And so the stork learned, to its grief, that you can often tell more about a bird by the company it keeps than by the feathers it wears.

